

Drinking Water Program Funding Committee
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Recommendations on Stabilizing Program Funding and Utilizing Fees

Committee Members

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Recommendations

1. Do not create a drinking water fee program.

Although funding within the Bureau of Drinking Water and Groundwater (Bureau) must be stabilized, it should not be accomplished by creating drinking water fees. As shown by a number of fee programs already in operation in state government, fee programs may not be equitable, tend to remove GPR (State) support, and their funds are sometimes diverted for uses other than those intended. Owners of drinking water systems, including local governments and private owners of regulated water systems¹, are facing financial challenges as significant as those of state government. Rather than creating yet another fee program, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Administration, the Governor and the Legislature should make safe drinking water a priority, worthy of being completely funded by GPR. The State's limited GPR resources should be allocated with public health protection as the top priority.

2. Allocate stable levels of General Purpose Revenue (GPR).

GPR is to be used when the "entire public benefits". The entire public benefits when people can travel anywhere in the State of Wisconsin and have safe water to drink. Clean, safe drinking water supports tourism, economic development and public health. Wisconsin's growth will be slowed not only by actual drinking water problems, but also by the public perception, should it develop, that the State may be having problems with the safety of its drinking water. To assure that this does not happen, the Bureau should receive adequate GPR funding to support regulation of drinking water supplies and the protection of groundwater. GPR dollars should be allocated to the Bureau at a stable level, year to year.

3. Fully utilize federal funding.

The Bureau has federal funding to hire additional, permanent staff. These positions should be allocated to the Bureau along with converting three project positions to permanent status.

4. Reverse Wisconsin's disinvestment in safe drinking water.

The Bureau is known for running an efficient and effective regulatory program. Unfortunately, now it is also known as having an under-funded and under-staffed

¹ This includes systems owned by entities such as churches, child-care centers, factories, taverns, restaurants and campgrounds.

program. This is the beginning of the perception problem raised above, in Recommendation #2. The Bureau has one staff person per every 165 public water systems. This is less than half the staff other states with similar numbers and types of regulated public water supplies employ.

With the lack of resources and staff, the Wisconsin program no longer meets federal Safe Drinking Water Act primacy requirements. The ability to assure that Wisconsin systems meet SDWA standards has diminished. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has required the Bureau to enter into a “disinvestment agreement”, due to resource cuts. This agreement cedes to EPA some of the State’s SDWA implementation authority. In addition, EPA has started directly enforcing certain regulation violations on selected Wisconsin systems. The State should take immediate steps to prevent further loss of SDWA implementation and enforcement control, take action to reverse the trend, and maintain an effective state-run regulatory program.

5. Increase awareness and support.

Although invited, not all stakeholders chose to participate in these discussions and final recommendations. Those that did participate recognize that increasing awareness and support for the protection of the State’s drinking water and groundwater resources is essential to stabilizing funding for the Bureau. Additionally, participants understand that alternatives to the above recommendations could result in higher costs to all stakeholders. The participants believe it is vital for success of the previous recommendations for all stakeholders to understand these issues.